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CHOSEN  
*But Free*



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Norman L. Geisler

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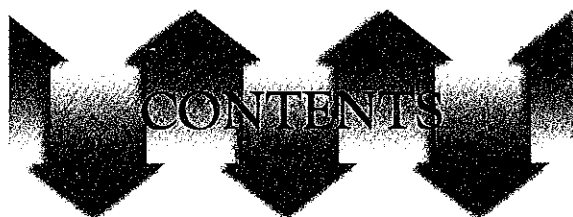
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point of His omniscience, the act is totally determined. Yet from the standpoint of our freedom it is not determined. God knows *for sure* what we will *freely* do. Both Augustine (see *City of God*, 5.9) and Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, 1a, 14, 4) answered this way. This is not to deny that God uses *persuasive* means to convince us to choose in the way that He desires. It is only to deny that God ever uses *coercive* means to do so.

### Self-determinism is contrary to God's grace

The Bible teaches that all the regenerate (justified) will ultimately be saved (see chapter 7). None shall perish (John 10:26–30) or ever be separated from Christ (Rom. 8:36–39). Indeed, all believers are in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:4) and are part of His body (1 Cor. 12:13). Hence, if any were severed from Christ, then part of Christ would have to be severed from Himself! Man can be faithless to God, but God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Salvation is not dependent on man but on God, and so it cannot be lost by man. Salvation was not gained by man's will (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16); therefore, it cannot be lost by it. Salvation is totally of grace, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

### Response

If salvation is conditioned wholly on God's grace and not on man's will, then how can man's free choice play any part in his salvation? The answer to this question is found in an important distinction between two senses of the word "condition." There are no conditions for God's *giving* of salvation; it is wholly of grace. But there is one (and only one) condition for *receiving* this gift—true saving faith.

There is absolutely nothing *in man* that is the basis for God saving him. But there was something *in God* (love) that is the basis for man's salvation. It was not because of any merit in man but only because of grace in God that salvation was initiated toward man. Man does not *initiate* salvation (Rom. 3:11), and he cannot *attain* it (Rom. 4:5). But he can and must *receive* it (John 1:12). Salvation is an unconditional act of God's election. Man's faith is not a condition for God *giving* salvation, but it is for man *receiving* it. Nonetheless, the act of faith (free choice) by which man receives salvation is not meritorious. It is the *Giver* who gets credit for the gift, not the receiver.

Why, then, does one person go to heaven and another not? Because God willed that all who receive His grace will be saved and that

all who reject it will be lost. And since God knew infallibly just who this would be, both the elect and non-elect were determined from all eternity. And this determination was not based on anything in man, including their free choice. Rather, it was determined on God's choice to save all who would accept His unconditional grace.

## THE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE ALLOWED

The degree of influence self-determinists acknowledge as to free actions will vary according to their accepted degree of "Calvinism" or "Arminianism." The maximum allowable for a self-determinist is high persuasion short of coercion. The minimum is zero. The scale of "persuasion allowed" ranges as follows:

- No influence allowed—Pelagian (no grace needed)
- Some influence allowed—Semi-Pelagianism (some grace needed)
- Much influence allowed—Arminianism (much grace needed)
- Great influence allowed—Moderate Calvinism (great grace needed; irresistible grace on the willing allowed)
- Overwhelming influence allowed—Extreme Calvinism (irresistible grace on the unwilling needed)

Some illustrations of acceptable and unacceptable influence will help make the point. If one decides to sit on his front porch where he can view the mountains, and hornets come and chase him inside, this last was not a truly free choice. He was coerced into doing it. If one proposes to a lover and is turned down, yet continues to court and woo her, this is compatible with free choice. However, if he attempts to force her to love him against her will, this is not love. If one is offered a dangerous job for \$40,000 a year and turns it down, yet later accepts the same job for \$80,000 a year, this is acceptable influence.

What about an "offer that is too good to refuse"? Is this compatible with a self-determinist's view of free will? Say that one is offered \$100 million a year for doing a job he hates. Is this not too good to refuse, and would not the acceptance of such an offer be a violation of self-determinism? The answer is no, since there is no coercion involved. He could have turned it down. Take as an example a wife who lives such a pure life that she would not even consider being unfaithful to her husband for \$100 million or more. The fact that an attractive male offers her \$100 million to commit adultery with him is in no way